UNDER FIRE. The Story of a Squad. By Henri Barbusse. (E. Dutton & Co.) \$1.50.

We have here the English version of a very powerful and popular French private soldler in the trenches. In the original, as Le Peu, it received the Academie Goncourt for the best work written during the year, sale of well over the hundred thousand copies. In English, as Under Fire, it is without deserved success. But it is success of another kind, and the success of a very different thing. Nor is this difference a mero matter of translation. That inevitable change is the least part of it. There is the whole further difference between the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon temperament and point of view; so that a Frenchman and an American would react differently to the same experiences and would express their reaction in different ways. If the book might be, by some sheer magic of the translator, made precisely and atterly identical in the two tongues it would still mean one thing to us and quite another to our brothers in arms across the sea

for French realism it is extreme. The author believes that truth is best conveyed by literal accuracy of detail-of all details-and being a Frenchman be puts his theory into practice. He makes a point of reproducing verbatim the talk of the pollus among themselves, without omission or modifying of what the translator calls "the big words." Now, pros mots does not mean big words; it means rough stuff, foul language of the sort that unpolished men speak alone together. It is often untranslatable, and in English quite unprintable. And if it were so printed, with all possible accuracy of rendering, the effect upon an English reader would not be at all the effect of the original. The effect in English would be of outrageous and disproportionate filth; whereas the effect in French is merely of men talking as such men do The translator attempts to convey the effect through an admixture of refined words for unrefined ideas with rather ancient and wholly Uritish slang. One can only sympathize with him in his impossible difemma; but the result

is what any reader may imagine and observe. This is only a detail, of course; but it is an illustrative detail. For the difficulty is not merely to find the best English equivalent for what the author | French, it is no such thing. It is their kind of heroism. has to say; the difficulty is that the same thing said in our own tongue to ourselves and in French to Frenchmen has often diverse meanings; nor that alone, but a diversity also of tone and suggestion and effect. Here, for example, is a typical paragraph of description:

Tandis que l'aule s'abattait sur nous comme un soir d'orage, je vis encore un fois émerger et se recréer sous l'écharpe de suie des nuages bas, les espèces de rives abruptes, tristes, et sales, infiniment sales, boussuées de débris et d'immondices, de la croulante tranchée où nous sommes. La lividité de la noue blêmit et plombe les sacs de terre aux plans vaguement luisants et bombées, tel un long entassement de viscères et d'entrailles géantes mises à nu sur le monde. Dans la paroi, derrière moi, se creuse une excavation, et là un entassement choses horizontales se dresse comme un bûcher. Des troncs d'arbres? Non: ce sont des cadavres.

Here it is in the English:

Again I saw, when the dawn came down on us like a stormy evening, the steep banks of our crumbling trench as they came to life again under the scoty scarf of the low hanging clouds, a trench dismal and dirty, infinitely dirty, humped with debris and filthiness. Under the livid sky the sandbags are taking

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the same bue, and their vaguely shining and rounded shapes are like the bowels crat; which is reason enough for the SLAVES OF THE LAMP. By and viscera of giants, nakedly exposed upon the earth.

In the trench wall behind me, in a hollowed recess, there is a heap of horizontal things like logs. Tree trunks? No, they are corpses.

Now, that is not ill translated; quite the contrary. And yet in the translation the whole character of the style is gone. It seems overintense, rhetorical, stagy; it agonizes to express each detail with the utmost violence, so that the whole impression weakens like the persuasiveness of an orator who raves book which deplets the violent facts of warfare from the point of view of the and screams, of a picture under one glare of light destroying color and shade. English reader. .It lacks light and shade and half-tones and proportion, and therefore loses force by constant violence, and emphasis by emphasizing everything alike. It is not so in French, because the normal pitch of French prose is so much higher that such writing does not seem forced or frenzied in the least by measurement upon its natural scale; it is only vigorous and vivid. The best way to read the book is by occasional chapters, or even pages. Then you get a striking impression by itself, and feel that it is poetic or wonderful or bizarre without weakening your appreciation by reiterated shocks.

And this is true not only of the style, but of the manner and substanc of the book throughout. It is embarrassed by its own richness of material. In any two or three chapters of it there are enough horror, enough literary force and enough stark humanity to suffice an ordinary volume. more than ordinary volume. There are bits like the death of Poterioo and enjoyed the inditing of it, and that, Take first the matter of translation. Le Fen is French realism; and even his vision of that which had been once his home; like the anger of Volpatte, despite its surface airiness, there is Holly Lea, the young actress who or the visit of Eudore to his wife Muricite; like the tale of Eudoxie, whom Lamuse loved from afar and at last found hideously near. Maupassant at his grimmest could hardly have bettered these; but Maurassant would have dealt ness of purpose. Imagine, if you please, with them singly, a story to each one

Finally there is this to be said of the impression of the book as a whole and its point of view upon the war. The general effect is of an obscene and stagnant nightmare, and that is doubtless true. Yet it is not all the truth. The war is more than that, as no one knows better than these French who have made their cause the defence of Christendom. French realism is always a hard thing for us to understand. For it means sometimes realizing the details and then romanticizing about those details; and it means often the strange use of horror as we use laughter, for a solvent of beauty and an antalote to sentimentalism. They emphasize hell but to throw light upon human nature standing erect and holding all hell in high disdain. For an Englishman or an American to write so of this war, as a mere wanton horror, would be at this time either weak or morbid. In a Frenchman writing for the

CRITICAL REVIEWS . OF IMPORTANT BOOKS

and no more. Sensible and normal felk with your own mind his wisdom, you are generally suspicious of mere clever- will be surprised to find how often ness. And they are quite right. It is and how violently you agree with him. easy enough to be elever if you do not If you only think that you think, care what you say. A firefly and a whereas in fact you get your opinions his prosaic wife strangely transstar may be equally sparkling, if bril- at second hand and ready made, you formed by the halo of their vanown underside in the hope of attracting attention.

There is, however, just one caution to be observed in the case of the pres-

erly that a public properly suspicious matter in search of a remedy. He of paradox blindly and blithely as-does his own thinking and takes no

normal person. For most of us thinking is very hard work. Emerson (who
could and did do it) called it the hardest thing in the world. Mr. Chesterton
of modern times who understands the

turn some commonplace upside down were written from 1913 to 1915. Now and say that parents must obey their Mr. Chesterton is not a Socialist, children or that man made God in his Neither is he a radical in the modern this kind of easy eleverness is that the roots. He is a radical in the sense commonplaces are frequently true, that he realizes, like every thinking Many silly little creatures can be man the gigantic faults of our modern cleverly; but Mr. Chesterton can tell industrial civilization and that he is the truth cleverly. He tells it so clev-quite willing to be to be root of the the mental labor involved in getting sumes that he must be talking non-smug catchwords for granted. And sense. We should probably have to since he is here writing for Socialists talk nonsense in order to be as brilliant he writes in their language. But do not be deceived by the appearance of If you do not see this, that is be- the word Capitalist on every other cause you are clever enough to appre- page. Observe what he says about clate cleverness and too lazy minded Capitalism and you will discover that to judge and reason and examine Mr. Chesterton's mind is not impris-truth. That is, you are an entirely oned in Greenwich Village. He may

can do it with apparent case, precisely meaning of the word; for re-volution as Paderewski plays the pland with means a turning back. He knows that apparent case, or as Matty could the future must build upon the past if pitch ball or Napoleon win bate progress is to have any same meaning ties; that is, by being a genius. You cannot progress from nowhere. But he does think. Make no mistake Also he is the greatest living demo-

TOPIA OF USURERS AND OTHER; about that. Being human he can be ESSAYS. By Gilbert K. Chester-mistaken, just as the Emperor could ton. (Bont & Liverght.) \$1.25. Much more often he is not mistaken, The difference between Mr. Chester- even when he flies in the face of some on and most other clever people is commonly taken for granted idea. And simply that Mr. Chesterton is so much if you will forget (having first en-more than merely clever; whereas the joyed) his wit, and give yourself the ordinarily clever man is merely clever pain of considering for yourself and space are let down and a poet's spirit

Thereis no difficulty about making epi-ent book. These essays were written grams which are lies. One has only to for a Socialist newspaper, and they

contemptuous unfaith with which he is regarded by the democracy. It is prophets; we express that same spirit by applauding them as comedians. The issues discussed in this particular ery of four jade plates inscribed in anbook, moreover, being questions of the days before the war are for the moment out of date. They are sleeping making Shandoo—smoking oplum. over they will abruptly become very

THE CREAM OF THE JEST. By James Reauch Cabell, (Mc-Bride and Company.) \$1.35.

reviewer can say with assurance of the last. With the recovery of every this volume is that Mr. Cabell vastly plate are introduced new and romantic an abundance of underlying serious- made all the trouble in the first place ness of purpose. Imagine, if you please, by selling the four plates to buy a fairly successful novelist no longer new frock. If you like detective stoyoung, and burdened with too ample flesh, possessed also of a wife in whom he is well content, but whose interests are confined to the fashons, the servants and the neighborbood gossip. Then all of a sudden this prosale novelist begins in waking dreams to identify himself confusedly with a character in one of his own mediæval romances and to hold won drous interviews with his heroine, wh s the One Woman in the World, the heroine of all romances past and future. In one of these dreams he receives from her a charm, the broken half of a circular piece of metal bearing a mystical inscription. Thereing hours to run scross a queer semicircular disk, which may or may not which always seems to hypnotize him into another of those dreams which coincide with the period of his greatest literary popularity. Mr. Cabell does not dictate what we'are to think. Perhaps there are ocmay leap back through the centuries and commune with the age old children of his own creation. Perhaps after an ample meal, saw, himself and star may be equally sparkling, if brilliance be the only question; but the star is a sun illuminating worlds, and the firefly illumines nothing but its forth verbal fireworks.

at second hand and ready made, you formed by the halo of the broken disk was really a talisman from wonder-the firefly illumines nothing but its part of the broken top of jar of massage cream. At all events Mr. Cabell does not tell us. Perhaps what he means to say is that the most prosale of us have within our reach visions of gay trappings and the spirit of chivalry if only we had the trick own image or that a husband is only a sense, which usually means a person of day dreaming expertunely. The relation by marriage. The trouble with who believes that things grow without chief harding of this clusive and chief handicap of this elusive and uncommon volume is that there are so many lazy minded readers, who, while recognizing that it contains a

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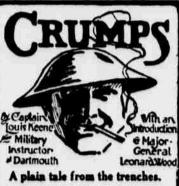
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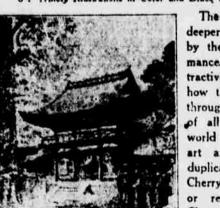
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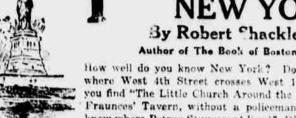
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